Depot Town Rag

Volume 23, Number 2

Mar/April 2008

There's something shady going on here

100% FREE *RAG* CONTENT

A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Arbor Day: April 27
...a lot like Ypsilanti's annual PRIDE Day

Arbor Day was established by J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City, Nebraska in 1872. Morton and his wife moved fromDetroit (not Ann Arbor, as is popularly believed) to the Nebraska Territory in 1854, where he was the editor of Nebraska's first newspaper. His influence as a journalist led to his involvement in politics, and he became a promoter of the settlement of Nebraska. The lack of trees, however, was an obstacle.

Morton proposed Arbor Day as a tree planting holiday in 1872. On the first Arbor Day, prizes were offered to counties and individuals for properly planting the largest number of trees. More than 1 million trees were planted in Nebraska on that day.

During the the 1870s, several other states passed legislation to observe Arbor Day and, by 1894, Arbor Day was celebrated in each state of the United States. In Michigan, it's the last Friday in April. This year, Ypsi folks will be planting trees in nearby Ann Arbor.

[See page five]

While many of Ann Arbor's famed arboreals are found at country clubs or college campus, some of Ypsi's more unique varieties stand at Highland Cemetery on North River Street

Award gets wide recognition

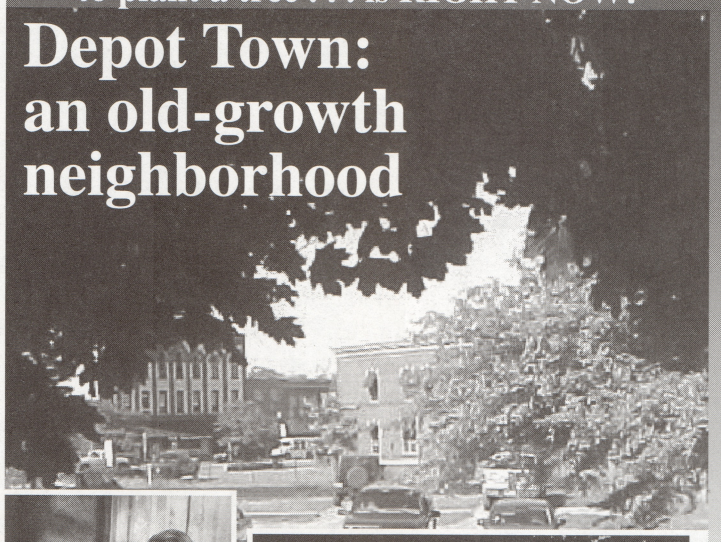
Merrill Guerra, CEO of Depot Town's newest business, RealKidz Inc., won the best-elevator-pitch competition at the eighth annual Collaboration for Entrepreneurship held in January at Washtenaw Community College. RealKidz makes and markets clothes for plus-sized kids.

"We are fortunate to have such great talent in our neighborhood," said Cheeky Monkey's Jim Curran."

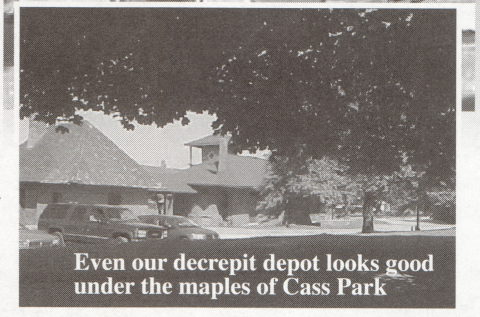
Guerra/Realkidz's award was announced in *Crain's Detroit Business* and the Sunday, January 27th *Detroit Free Press*.

Tree-huggers agree: The best time to plant a tree . . . is RIGHT NOW!

Depot Town: an old-growth neighborhood

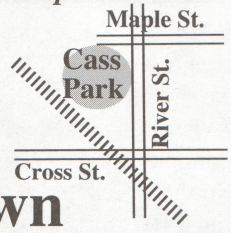


"Tell about the trees, Doctor; were there ever any trees in Ypsilanti?" [Peggy Ann Garner & James Dunn in "A Tree Grows in Brooklyn"]



Even our decrepit depot looks good under the maples of Cass Park

Just about everybody knows about Riverside Park and Frog Island Park—but Cass Park? Virtually ignored since the passing of Civil War reunions held there, Cass Park shows some of the greenest views of this old commercial block from beneath the shady maples... at the foot of *Maple* Street!



A Tree Grows in Depot Town

Sumac grew up along sidewalks from the basement window wells in front of many of our businesses not long ago. Many of them lasted through the fall season with brilliant red leaves the only bright color on the block.

When new sidewalks were poured in 1976, shopping center-style locust trees were planted in the anti-parking bunkers and were watered from hoses stretched across the street.

The parks have always held our grandest tree specimens, with a grove at the south end of Riverside Park, leafy perimeter trees around the Frog Island track, and stately maples in Cass Park. One of the maples across from the Civil War barracks was hit by lightning last summer and removed, but its partner still guards the vets' memory.

Trees have flourished along the river as 'volunteers,' eventually falling into the Huron and tying up traffic downriver.

First DTCDC grant approved

Depot Town Community Development Corporation has been approved to receive a $15,000 grant from Fifth Third Bank. This funding will support DTCDC's efforts in the development of Riverside and Frog Island Parks and will be used for capacity building.

This month a site visit of the parks will determine eligibility for further funding. Brian Vosburg and Truman Hudson were instrumental in bringing in this first grant.

State Botanical Club conducting survey to locate largest trees

Ypsilanti Daily Press,
Labor Day weekend, 1957

In keeping with the Michigan Botanical Club survey to locate the big trees of Michigan, Dr. Clarence M. Loesell, Natural Science Department head, Eastern Michigan College, illustrates to the three Cox brothers, Jackie, Jimmy and Jerry, the circumference of a 90 to 100 year old oak tree on the Breakey Farm, 1885 Packard Rd. He is measuring four feet from the ground.

We can't find the Cox boys, either [-ed]

Fifty years later: *Now Ypsilanti Public Schools' Administrative offices, space dominates the lawn after a storm leveled several trees about three years ago.*

The Champion Tree Project

was started to identify National and State Champion Trees located in Michigan.

National Champions are the biggest of species and State Champions are largest of the species in a state.

Michigan ranked 6th in the nation with 48 champions at last count including a 111 ft. Northern Catalpa, a 26 ft. Eastern Redbud, and a 107 ft. Paper Birch.

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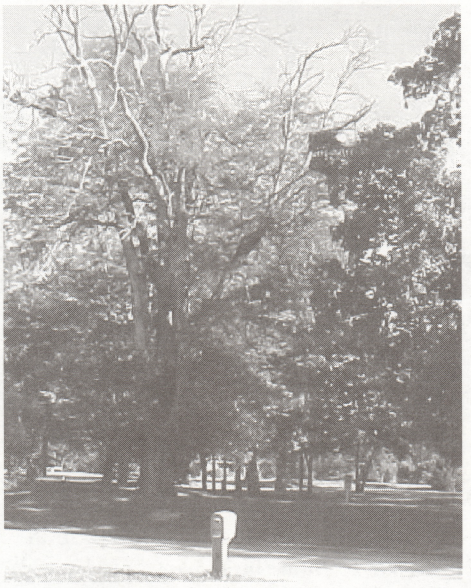
Look! Up in the air!

It's *Super Tree*!!!

Look up. Don't take them for granted. Trees flourish along the riverbank and in fence-rows. They arch over our streets and shade our yards. They have been standing around here for a long, long time and they never get bored. We shouldn't either.

Left: White thorn (Acacia constricta) Right: The State Champion Thornberry Honey Locust at 8145 Stony Creek Road shows signs of old age and stress



Really Big Trees still surround us here

The Michigan Botanist lists 345 different common names of the state's Big Trees and Shrubs from Alaska-Cedar running through Alders, Apples, and Apricots to Yellow-wood, Yew-Halloran, and Zelkova-Japanese.

The Big Tree Program of the Michigan Botanical Club started soon after the organization of the club in 1941. Paul Thompson, affiliated with the Cranbrook Institute of Science, became the state's Big Tree Coordinator and served in the capacity for over forty years until his death in 1994. Many individuals, mostly Michigan Botanical Club members, worked with Thompson over the years as he set about discovering, measuring, and recording Michigan's biggest trees and shrubs. Champion-sized trees were reported to American Forests, nominated for National Champion status, and subsequently listed in the "National Register of Big Trees" issued every two years by American Forests. Elwood Ehrle, from Western Michigan University, began working with Thompson in 1991. Always on the lookout for big trees, Dr. Elwood Ehrle can be contacted at woodyehrle5098@sbcglobal.net or 616-375-1953.

Washtenaw County's National Champion Trees:

Common Juniper, 5 m. north of Chelsea and **Box Elder**, Saline & Mooreville Rd, NW of Milan

Many local trees made Michigan's Big Trees List:

In Ypsilanti:
Thornberry Honey Locust (above), 8145 Stoney Creek, south of Ypsilanti
Wild Black Cherry, south of Ypsilanti, north end of Pineview, N. of Textile Rd.
[After several expeditions, the editors could not find this famed tree. Send us a pic if you can.]

In Ann Arbor:
Amur Maple, Black Willow, Burning Bush, Chinese Lacebark Elm, Chinkapin Oak, Deam Oak, Douglas Fir, Eastern Redbud, English Elm, English Walnut, False Indigo, Fringe Tree, Katsura Tree, Lacebark Pine, Nordman Fir, Paperbark Maple, Persimmon, River Birch, Saucer Magnolia, Yellow-wood

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Contrast and compare:

Shopping-center-style locusts were planted in the parking bunkers (*dotted line*) and along the west side of Market Alley (*dash line*) in the same year. In comparision, street-side specimens seem severely stunted, probably due to auto emissions.

A unique species: Wandering Maple

The lone maple near DTA's Caboose is doing fine, thank you. Yanked from its bunker along East Cross Street for conformity, this young tree was transplanted in the Market Plaza and has flourished near concrete and brick pavers in its new location.

Water main break repaired
Streetside tree missing

Anyone making a right turn into Aubree's parking lot in December must have noticed how much easier it was without the bunker/planter on the east side of that turn from Cross Street. That's because it was removed In A Really Big Hurry on December 13.

Sandee French says, "I noticed bubbling water coming up through the cement as I entered the lot. I called the police, who called YCUA. Yup, a main had burst. To get the pipe fixed, our men from YCUA had to go deep through the planter. When I drove by and noticed the tree with all our brand new LED lights was gone, I called our tree police—Carolyn McKeever. I needn't have worried. The guys gently removed all the lights and returned them to Carolyn. The tree was a different story."

Was the planter box worth saving? French says, "You'll notice if you drive by, they didn't save it. In 2009 our streetscape project will begin and both planter boxes will be removed...YCUA just helped us start our project a little early."

"Thanks to the YCUA crew," says French, "who worked late to make sure that every building, business, and apartment had water the next day. Ya gotta love our city and the extra effort by those who work outside doing a tough job!"

Kiss your ash trees goodbye

Many of us did not even know which were the ash trees––until the Emerald Ash Borer came through southern Michigan and killed them all. The Riverside Arts Gallery last year commemorated their passing with an exhibition (It Grows on Trees) of art created from the carcasses of hundreds of ash trees that once lined our city streets.

Settlers' legacies

Many of the trees along the Huron River behind the stately homes on Huron and River Streets were planted as shade trees in the yards of the early mill owners and managers.

Top tree:

Michigan's official state tree since 1955, the tallest White Pine is 201feet.

"Trees can be a stimulus to economic development, attracting new business and tourism. Commercial retail areas are more attractive to shoppers, apartments rent more quickly, tenants stay longer, and space in a wooded setting is more valuable to sell or rent." *—The Arbor Day Foundation*

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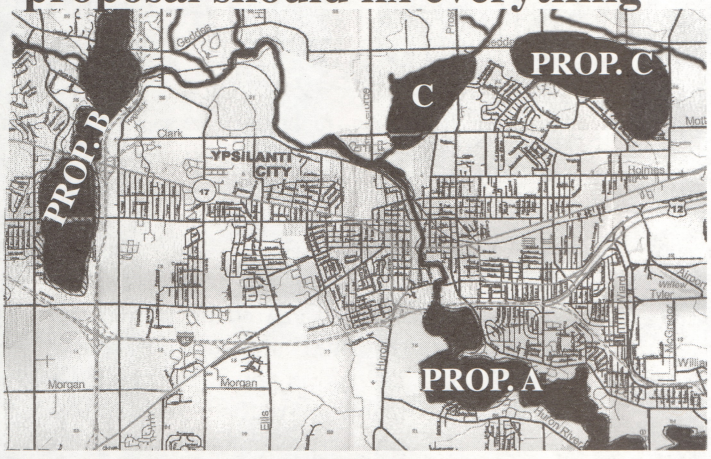
A "wet belt" proposal should fix everything

A plan very much like Oakland County's successful road blockage

No lakes in Ohio?

The state just to our south has only one natural lake—Lake Erie. All the rest of Ohio's lakes are fake lakes, artificially created.



Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor are just too close together and with the proliferation of fast-franchises they are getting closer all the time. A new plan proposes an Ypsi *isthmus*, separating itself with a *wet belt* perimeter.

When Ann Arbor Mayor John Heifje proposed a *greenbelt* to keep his concrete-bound citizens inside a halo of green and growing stuff, he could not make a barrier complete with the proliferation of proletariat products that has cascaded down Stadium Boulevard, rushing toward Ypsilanti on Washtenaw Avenue. Heifje's greenbelt of verdant farmland makes a huge letter C around his city—with its open end gaping toward vulnerable Ypsilanti.

It's been done before

Ypsi tried a similar concept years ago known as the *black belt* system. This karate chop to civilization isolated minorities in the city's south side and eventually crept into Willow Run, effectively separating the races until Civil Rights legislation changed how we finance real estate.

Activists have suggested Ypsi needs a better barrier from the exigencies and eventualities of Ann Arbor. US-23, they say, may not be enough of a barrier:

Proposal A for dividing the community was implemented by Henry Ford in 1930 when he dammed up the Huron River to create Ford Lake, separating the City from most of the Township. Ypsilanti can learn much from this. A new proposal takes the concept to the west just 78 years later.

Proposal B creates another dam on the river, this one built beneath the bridge at US-23. The resulting backwater would inundate Concordia University and Arborland Mall. Like New Orleaneans, both would have to move to higher ground.

This places St. Joseph Mercy Hospital and its subsidiaries on the Ypsi-side of "Arbor Lake," no matter what their ZIP code says. Ann Arbor will just have to make-do with one hospital.

Washtenaw Community College will see little change with the new lake, since most of our blue-collar kids live on the east side of the county.

Better than an income tax

Ferries will replace the bridges at Geddes, Washtenaw, and Ellsworth, adequately supplanting the income tax from all those EMU employees who live out of town. See? Things are getting better already.

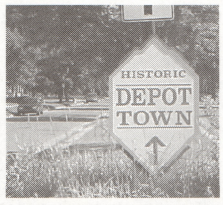
But wait; there's more:

Proposal C will follow in a few years. Several of the creeks north and east of Ypsilanti will be impounded to create a chain of "Superior Lakes." Many need better names anyway; Lake Snidecar rather than Snidecar Drain; Flemming Creek and the Willow Run will be Flemming Fjiord and Willow Pond. The Superior No. One Drain will become the headwaters of the "Superior Almost-Chain of Lakes."

The "New Ypsilanti" will not qualify as an island, but an isthmus, a picturesque "land between the lakes."

In the next Rag:

Take a ramble down River Street and see Ypsilanti's historic Supply Side of town



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A monthly publication of
the Depot Town Association, Inc.
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Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198
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The Depot Town Association, Inc.

Gary McKeever, President
Merrill Guerra , Vice President
Carole Clare, Treasurer
Sandee French, Scy. & Past President
Website: www.depottown.org
DTA meets at 6:30 p.m on the third Wednesday of each month at Café Luwak, 42 East Cross Street.

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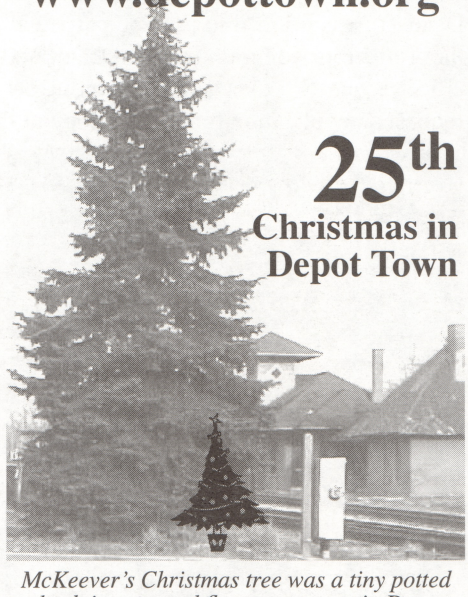

25th Christmas in Depot Town

McKeever's Christmas tree was a tiny potted shrub in a second floor apartment in Depot Town in 1982. When the holiday was over, the owners transplanted it in the garden area near the crux of Cross, River, and the railroad tracks. Now decorating contractors use a cherry-picker to decorate it for the holidays.

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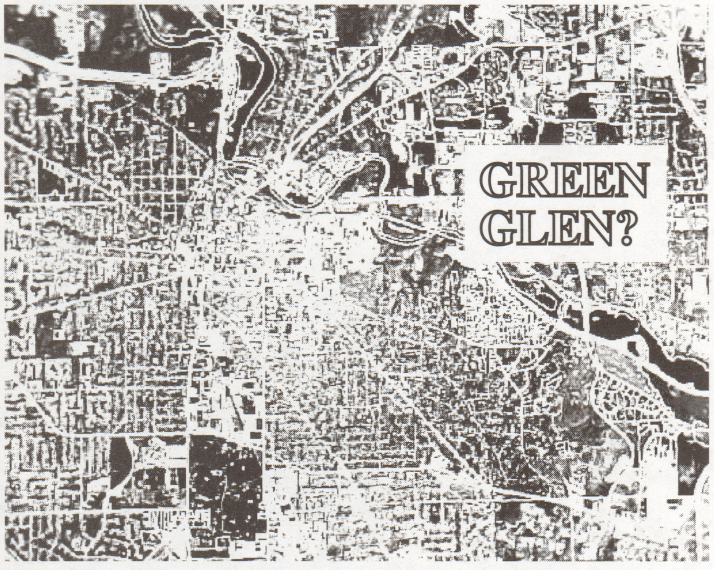
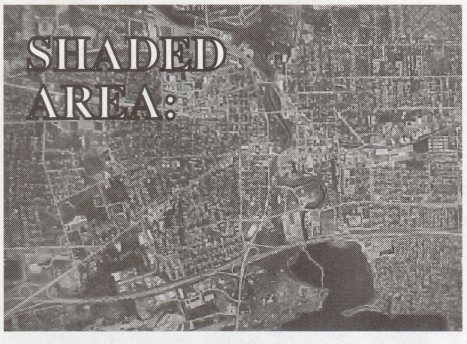


Green Glen?: *The Ann Arbor Bonsai Society grows tiny trees in pots of water around town but, unfortunately, they are not discernable in this 2005 aerial photo.*

Philanthropic measures taken

So concerned was Elizabeth Dean about the harsh terrain and lack of trees in Ann Arbor that, in 1964, she willed nearly two-million dollars to "be held in a separate fund by the City of Ann Arbor and the income thereof to be used to repair, maintain and replace trees on City property." Only the annual interest income generated by the Dean Trust is utilized to provide perpetual tree service benefits to the Ann Arbor community. The Dean Fund Committee welcomes citizen requests for special tree planting projects. Call 994-2780 to request an application form and a copy of the project guidelines.



Tree-lined streets and parks, downtown and Depot Town, the Huron River and Ford Lake in Ypsilanti

"Tree Town" may be a lot closer than you thought

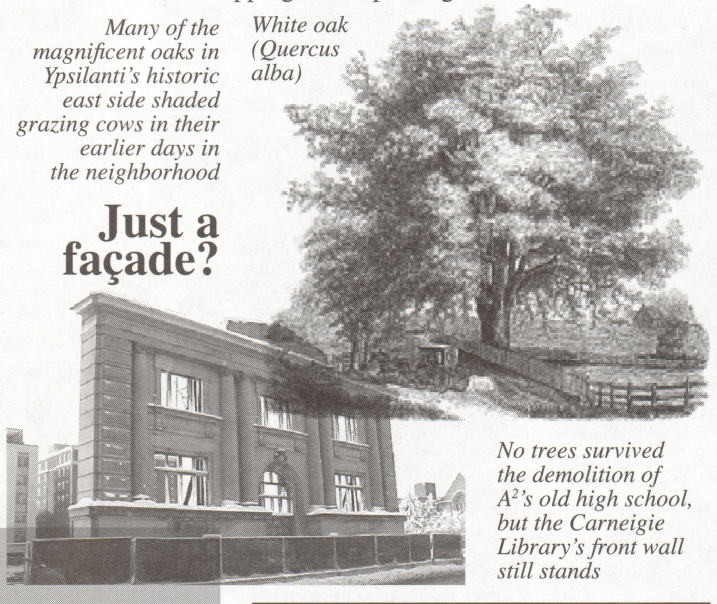
"Ann Arbor's lovely tree-lined streets long ago earned the city its 'Tree Town' nickname," says UM's *Destination, Ann Arbor* Website. Notice how the reference is vague about when ("long ago"), without verification of the "earned" honor.

Does Ann Arbor really have more trees than most towns? Former Ypsilanti City Manager Steve Shutt often said, "That's just not the reality of the situation. If you got up in an airplane and compared the tree cover in Ann Arbor to that found here, Ypsilanti would look like a forest, while Ann Arbor would resemble a series of paved parking lots and highways loosely connected by smatterings of shrubs."

So we tried it. And here are the results on this page—no per-capita schedules; no square-foot ratios—just aerial photos of the tree cover in these almost-adjoining towns (see: www.ewashtenaw.org, Map-Washtenaw Property Mapping). A quick glance at the 2005 aerial views shows streets nearly obliterated by trees in Ypsi. Ann Arbor looks more like a shopping center parking lot. You do the math.

Many of the magnificent oaks in Ypsilanti's historic east side shaded grazing cows in their earlier days in the neighborhood

White oak (Quercus alba)



Just a façade?

No trees survived the demolition of A²'s old high school, but the Carneigie Library's front wall still stands

Trees of Two Cities

[2000 People Population Census, not trees!]

Arborland	Ypsiland
City 114,024 ppl	City 22,262 ppl
Township 4720	Township 49,182
(Township surrounded by the City)	*(City mostly surrounded by the Township)*
Total:118,744	**Total: 71,444**
[32.98 ppl psm*]	[19.8 ppl psm]

** people per square mile*

Only 36 square miles available in each area for tree planting or shopping centers.

NOTE: With almost twice the people per square mile in A²'s population area, Ypsi tree donors are encouraged to plant smaller varieties of trees.

April 27 is Take a Tree to Ann Arbor Day

Ypsilanti residents are encouraged to observe Arbor Day 2008, April 27, by transplanting an Ypsi tree to Ann Arbor. Be warned, however, that you will need to apply for a permit from the Ann Arbor City Forester's Office for any tree trimming, planting, or removal.

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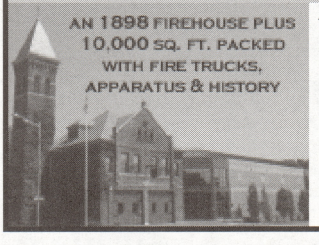

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The giant oak at 1268 Lester once stood on the Gault Farm south of I-94 and may have dictated the street layout for the subdivision

A quiz:
Can you guess the ZIPs of these "tree houses"?

- Tree City Painting Company *(48103 and 48197) A² & Ypsi*
- Tree Town Toys *(48105) A²*
- Tree Town Transportation *(48103) A²*
- Tree Town Inc. *(48103) Dexter*
- Trees Traveling *(48118) Chelsea*
- Treemaster, Inc. *(48189) Whitmore Lk.*

Tree services listed locally:

Ann Arbor (10), Brighton (7), Plymouth (3), Whitmore Lake (3), Canton Twp (4), Pinckney (4), Dexter (2), South Lyon (2), Ypsilanti Twp (2).

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Neighborhood's family tree truly has oak-like sustainability

This old commercial district has enjoyed steady occupancy since it was first remodeled to meet the railroad in 1838. There's been an occasional vacancy on the first floors and some of the upstairs ballrooms have not seen parties in a while but, mainly, Depot Town just keeps on keepin' on.

At the end of 2007, daily newsies worried in print that the closing of two shops and a new owner of a popular restaurant could signify a down-turn in local business health. Might such changes indicate this block is joining Michigan's steady economic decline?

That's not likely. With continuous change, we look forward to the next incarnation.

AT&T's theme for supplying cell phone service seems to work here, as well: "More bars in more places" is a motto that can be read in many ways—just ask the folks who frequent Aubree's, Sticks, Sidetrack, Cady's, and the Corner Brewery. It's an ethic that has remained constant over the years. The names have changed; the ethic remains. Neighborhoodliness works in old commercial district's like this one.

It certainly helps to have family-oriented museums book ending our block, and when we spill our collections into the middle of the street for parades and expositions, all those folks come pouring out of the shops and restaurants to fill the streets with happy activity. Don't look for that kind of positive promotion at the mega malls this season.

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